THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

BENGALURU • FRIDAY • MARCH 05, 2021 • ₹7.00 • PAGES 34 • LATE CITY EDITION

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KERALA BJP PITCHES 'METRO MAN' SREEDHARAN AS CM FACE

The technocrat will be the BJP's chief ministerial candidate, senior party leader and Union Minister V Muraleedharan said

FINAL DECISION NOT TAKEN: MURALEEDHARAN

The minister's social media post on E Sreedharan's leadership in the upcoming Assembly polls came hours after the party's state chief K Surendran said he has requested the national leadership to announce the 'Metro Man' as NDA's chief ministerial candidate. Muraleedharan later clarified that the BJP has not taken a final decision on it

END OF 24-YEAR ASSOCIATION WITH DMRC

- Meanwhile, Sreedharan's 24-year long career with the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation ended on Thursday as he quit his advisory role
- The 88-year-old said age has not affected his health. "Mentally I am very strong. I will not be working like a normal politician. I will still be working like a technocrat," Sreedharan added |P7

April 6

WHEN ELECTIONS TO THE 140-SEAT KERALA ASSEMBLY WILL BE HELD

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

Defectors to get Bengal BJP ticket

MANISH ANAND @ New Delhi

WITH the BJP on Thursday getting down to the business of finalising candidates for all poll-bound states, the thrust was on high skill-sets and qualifications along with the ability to resonate with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's call for "innovative leadership to execute the vision of the party and the government on the ground."

While the BJP is likely to draft in fresh blood in Assam to beat anti-incumbency, professionals who are achievers are being favoured in West Bengal, Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

The BJP's central election committee meeting, convened by party chief J P Nadda, was attended by Modi and senior Union ministers like Amit Shah, Rajnath Singh, Narendra Singh Tomar. Assam Chief Minister Sarbananda Sonowal, state minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, and leaders from the West Bengal party's unit were among those who attended.

The party is likely to release its list of candidates in the next few days in a phased manner in line with the staggered poll schedule. "Special focus during screening of candidates is on their educational qualifications and innovative leadership skills to execute the vision of the prime minister to connect the initiatives of the government with the people," said a senior BJP functionary.

Also, potential candidates who have the ability to take the party forward in the next decade, too, will get picked, the functionary added,

In line with the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, the BJP is leaning towards fielding a large number of turncoats, including sitting legislators, who joined the party from the ranks of the ruling Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, with source saying that the star power of actors and actresses, too, will be factored in.

While a few sitting MPs have evinced interest to contest Assembly elections in Assam, sources said the party isn't in favour of fielding Members of Parliament in West Bengal, as they would be tasked with helping build the poll campaign.

The West Bengal unit has recommended Trinamool Congress defector and former state minister Suvendu Adhikari from the Nandigram constituency against incumbent Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. P10

PARTY TO FIELD PROFESSIONALS IN KERALA, TN

"In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the BJP will give ample scope to professionals with credible public achievements besides the committed cadre in the candidate selection, while the turncoats from the Congress will get the ticket in Puducherry," sources stated.

BUDGET ESTIMATES 2020-21
(AS PER CM's SPEECH)

BUDGET SIZE
₹2,37,893 cr
(1.6% more than 2019-20)

Estimated revenue: Surplus of ₹ 143 cr
Likely revision: Revenue deficit
Estimated fiscal deficit: **2.55%** of GSDP
Likely revision: About **5%** of GSDP
Liabilities: **20.42%** of the GSDP
Likely revision: More than **25%** of GSDP

K'taka may see revenue deficit year

CM to present budget on Monday; Outlay for FY 2021-22 may be similar to previous fiscal

ANUSHA RAVI @ Bengaluru

DESPITE facing severe financial distress due to cuts in devolution of funds, central funding, lesser GST compensation and a dip in growth rate, Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa had presented a revenue surplus budget for 2020-2021 in March last year. As the fiscal year draws to an end, the state might see a revenue-deficit year for the first time in decades.

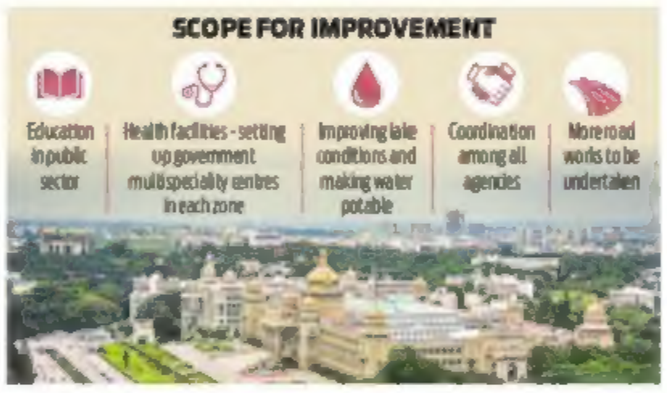
The national economic slowdown, worsened by the Covid-19-induced lockdown, is all set to take Karnataka into revenue deficit with liabilities exceeding 25 per cent and the fiscal deficit up to 5 per cent of the GSDP owing to additional borrowings to offset losses arising out of GST compensation loss. Given that the state's financial worries have worsened over the year, the difference in budget outlay for 2021-2022 is expected to be wafer thin in comparison to the outlay for 2020-2021. Slow recovery and estimated shortfall in the collection of state's own taxes has also added to the fiscal burden.

While a 'one-time' amendment was made to the Karnataka Fiscal Responsibility Act to allow increased borrowing for the 2020-2021 fiscal, the Finance Department now suggests that the amendment could be brought once again for the next fiscal year if need be. "The amendments were brought in to say fiscal deficit will be up to 5 per cent, liabilities will be higher than 25 per cent and we may face revenue deficit. That is how this fiscal year is likely to end. The Union Government, in its budget for 2021-2022, has allowed states to borrow an additional 1 per cent over and above the 3 per cent of GSDP. Based on necessity, we have to bring an amendment again," an official explained.

In its estimates for the budget 2021-2022, the state Finance Department has taken note that there is a shortfall in revenue receipts. P4

B'LURU TOPS ON CENTRE'S EASE OF LIVING INDEX

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
@ Bengaluru


SCOPE FOR IMPROVEMENT
Education in public sector
Health facilities - setting up government multispeciality centres in each zone
Improving lake conditions and making water potable
Coordination among all agencies
More road works to be undertaken

BENGALURU is an easy-going city to live in, and it's just not the climate, but also because of the presence of lung spaces, economic viability and lifestyle.

In the rankings released by Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, under the Smart Cities mission, on Thursday, Bengaluru was ranked number one on the Ease of Living Index in the category of cities with over one million population. Bengaluru scored 66.70 on a scale of 100, while Pune, which ranked second, scored 66.27. In the category of cities with less than one million population, Davanagere in Karnataka was ranked ninth.

"It is something to be proud of, as last year, Bengaluru's ranking was 58. It shows that the targets which the City has set are high, there is performance and people are also satisfied with what is being done. The projects which have been undertaken are also in the right direction," Bengaluru Smart City Ltd Managing Director Rajendra Cholan said.

The ranking was given based on three broad parametres — quality of life (facilities in health, education, safety and security, waste management practices), economic availability (scope for economic development of the city, employment opportunities and scope for professionals to grow), and sustainability.

However, for municipal performance, no city from Karnataka featured in the top 10 in both the categories.

CONTINUED ON: P9

IISc study shows higher virus mutations in B'luru

NIRAD MUDUR @ Bengaluru

A study by the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, has revealed that mutations in the SARS-CoV-2 virus that causes Covid-19, are occurring at a higher and faster rate in Bengaluru than the national and global average. The IISc team has also provided the first evidence of a protein that expresses itself in suppressing the body's immune response to SARS-CoV-2 virus by using a technique called high resolution mass spectrometry.

The study of viral samples recovered from nasal secretions of consenting Covid-19-positive individuals in Bengaluru, published in the Journal of Proteome Research, found that the three Bengaluru isolates analysed had 27 mutations in the viral genomes with over 11 mutations per sample — more than both the national average of 8.4 and global average of 7.3, an institute release said.

However, precisely how virulent these mutated SARS-CoV-2 variants are, is not yet known. Utpal Tatu, Professor in the Department of Biochemistry at IISc, who led the study, told *The New Indian Express*, "Virulence of a certain variant comes to light only when that variant becomes stabilised." P3

Doctors seek nodal officers at vax centres

Amidst increased registrations on CoWIN, and scores of citizens heading to hospitals for their jab, health staffers are struggling to manage crowds. Hence, doctors are asking that nodal officers be deputed at these centres to help ease the situation. P3

Now, renew DL online

DRIVING LICENCE

Want your driving licence renewed? No need to bribe RTO sharks, you can do it online through Aadhaar-based authentication from now. A look at some of the DL-related services you can avail online

- Learner's Licence
- Renewal of driving licence for which test of competence to drive is not required
- Duplicate DL
- Change of address in DL and certificate of registration
- Issuing international driving permit
- Surrender of class of vehicle from licence
- Application for temporary registration of motor vehicle
- Application for registration of motor vehicle with fully built body
- Application for issue of duplicate certificate of registration
- Application for NOC for certificate of registration
- Notice of transfer of ownership of motor vehicle
- Application for transfer of ownership of motor vehicle
- Intimation of change of address in certificate of registration
- Endorsement or termination of hire-purchase agreement

This will reduce the compliance burden on citizens, helping them avail these services in a hassle-free, contactless manner

It will also reduce the footfall in RTO offices

Aadhaar authentication mandatory for these contactless services

OTT

REGULATE CONTENT ONLINE, SC TELLS GOVT

The apex court on Thursday observed that OTT platforms at times show pornographic content, and there should be a mechanism to screen such programmes | P9

EXPRESS READ

₹650 cr discrepancies found, claims IT Dept

New Delhi: The I-T Department has detected irregularities of over Rs 650 crore after it raided homes and offices of actor Taapsee Pannu, director Anurag Kashyap and his partners. Raids continued in Mumbai, Pune and Hyderabad on Thursday too. P9

8.5%

EPFO keeps interest rate for FY21 unchanged

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has fixed the interest rate on provident fund deposits at 8.5% for 2020-21 — the same as the last year.

The decision was taken at the 228th meeting of the Central Board of Trustees of the EPFO, held in Srinagar under the chairmanship of Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Union Minister of State for Labour and Employment.

"The Central Board recommended 8.50% annual rate of interest to be credited on EPF accumulations in members' accounts for the financial year 2020-21. The interest rate will be officially notified in the government gazette following which EPFO would credit the rate of interest into the subscribers' accounts," the board said in a statement.

The decision came on the back of large withdrawals and fewer contributions throughout the last year amid the coronavirus pandemic. There were apprehension that the rate might be further reduced.

Sources said the EPFO will be left with a surplus of ₹300 crore after crediting an interest rate of 8.5% for FY21 to its six-crore subscribers.

In March 2020, EPFO had reduced the interest rate to 8.5% for 2019-20 — a seven-year low — from 8.65% in 2018-19.

Net new enrolments with the retirement fund body grew 24% to 1.25 million in December, indicating a return to the pre-Covid levels of subscriber growth for the EPFO, according to the payroll data released last Saturday.

Karnataka State Handicrafts Development Corporation Limited
(A Government of Karnataka Enterprise)

In association with
Development Commissioner (Handicrafts),
Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, New Delhi

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Sri C.C. Patil
Hon'ble Minister for Small Scale Industries and Information & Public Relations

Chief Guest
Smt. Bharathi Shetty
Hon'ble Member of Legislative Council

Presided by
Sri M. Satish Reddy
Hon'ble Member of Legislative Assembly, Bommanahalli Constituency

In the August Presence of

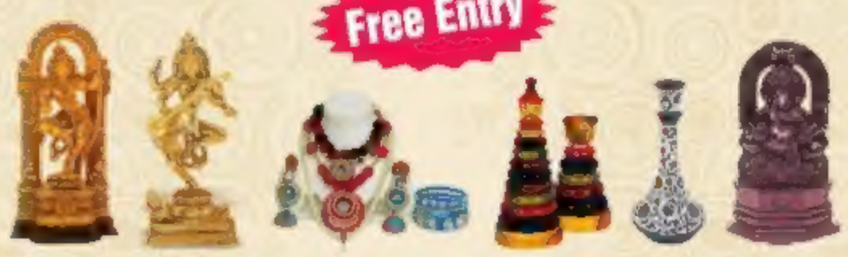
Dr. Beloor Raghavendra Shetty
Hon'ble Chairperson, KSHDCL

Smt. D. Roopa Moudgil, IPS
Managing Director, KSHDCL

Sri G.S. Dayananda
Director, KSHDCL

Date: 05.03.2021, Friday at 4.00 p.m, Venue: White Houzz Convention Hall, No.04(B), 14th Main, Next to BDA Complex, HSR Layout, 6th Sector, Bengaluru-560102.

Free Entry



Exhibition cum Sale: From 05.03.2021 to 11.03.2021
Time : From 10.00 am to 8.30 pm (open on Sunday also)
For online shopping visit : www.cauveryhandicrafts.net

DIPR/KSHDCL/03/2020-21

SLEAZEGATE FALLOUT

Jarkiholi slips out of sight, brother Balachandra takes up issue with DKS

BANSY KALAPPA @ Bengaluru

WHERE is **Ramesh Jarkiholi**? No one really knows, though it is suspected that he is holed up in a safe house in Bengaluru.

Jarkiholi, who resigned as Water Resources minister, has not met any friend or visitor since Tuesday evening, ever since the sleaze videos were aired on vernacular television channels and went viral on cell phones. His phones are switched off. His official media WhatsApp group has been disbanded. And his PRO Shankar is not entertaining any curious media calls.

Though the assembly is in session, Jarkiholi has stayed away, as has his brother, Yamkanmaradi MLA Satish Jarkiholi from the Congress. Only Arabhavi MLA and older brother Balachandra Jarkiholi attended the session on Thursday.

Balachandra was sighted in the legislature lounge, having a private word with Ramesh's bête noire, KPCC president DK Shivakumar. There was buzz on Tuesday that Shivakumar could be the person behind the sting, but by Thursday, sources were suggesting that the CD was actually "friendly fire" – which means the suspicion now is that someone from the BJP carried it out. The meeting between Balachandra and Shivakumar only seemed to confirm that there were many angles to the incident, and both leaders kept it private, minus security guards and assistants.

Sources said the CD copies reached all news channel offices around 4.30 pm Tuesday, independent of Dinesh Kallahalli, the RTI activist who was preparing to meet the police commissioner at his office.

CONTINUED ON: P4